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Ode to Immortality.
The Dreamer.

Three Poems
by
Arthur S. Howe

San Jose, California
1908

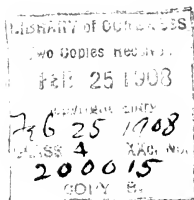


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ARTHUR S. HOWE

To the Dreamers of the World, the men and women whose heaven-illuminated consciousness has enabled them to look beyond the personal and particular, and behold the general and universal; who, penetrating beyond the mists and clouds of the present, can catch the gleams of the rising sun of a better day; in recognition of their service to humanity, and in the hope and anticipation of the dawn of Universal Brotherhood—the glorious morning when “the symbol rises into fact,” this little tribute is dedicated by

The Author.

The Greater Love.

"Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friend."

In ages long gone by, in ancient land,
The "Son of Man" this law of love declared:
"No greater love is known by any man
Than this: that for the friend whose love he
shared
He give his life." Thus spake Palestine's Sage,
And in the utterance of that beauteous thought
Stated a truth, of which, in every age,
Devotion hath the living witness brought.

Yes, 'tis a price that tests the depth of love
To lay down life—to calmly welcome death
For love's dear sake—and thus to willing prove
Its deep devotion; and with parting breath
To sing love's song; to count the grave rich gain,
E'en while life's promise shines forth bright
and clear;
To die to earth—to conquer death and pain—
All for the friend whose love is held most dear.

But what of those who calmly greet death's hour,
Unspurred by special friendships—selfish love;
Whose courage manifests the living power
Of Universal Love from Heaven above?
Is their devotion less, because they die
For love of ALL HUMANITY? Are they
Who hear and feel the groan—the bitter cry
Of multitudes upon life's weary way—

And, hearing, do not hesitate to place
Upon Love's altar, with its heav'n-lit fire,
Their lives—a sacrifice for all the race—
With love surpassing passion or desire,
Accounted less the lover than the one
Whose aims—whose life—whose all—are centered near
His special loves and friendships—his alone—
Those dear to him, and those he holds most dear?

Grim souls, whose glorious heights of love can reach
Above the realm of personal griefs and fears;
Whose depths of feeling, all controlled, can teach
And wean the suffering masses from their tears;
Yea, wake them to beget the stronger life,
Born of a righteous anger, sired by hate
And christened "Justice;" reared 'mid scenes of strife;
Molded in human passions, grand and great.

Grand souls, whose love, sublime, unterrified,
Unmoved can stand, while empires pass away;
Great souls, who, persecuted, vilified,
Still dare proclaim to earth the dawning day
Of BROTHERHOOD. Who stand amid the strife,
And, struggling onward 'mid war's hellish
glare,
Proclaim "the Resurrection and the Life"—
Earth's glad, free morning, beautiful and fair.

Souls who can realize, and who can see
The gleam of Freedom's morn; and who can
bear
The hatred e'en of those they seek to free
From tyranny, injustice and despair,
Souls who seek not for approbation's meed;
Who, lusting not for popular assent,
Proclaim the gospel of man's greater need,
Though institutions fall and states be rent.

Souls who, with prophet's vision, calm and grand,
Can gaze into the future, and can see
Oppression's fetters broken by the hand
Of Man enlightened, and of Woman free.
Souls who, enraptured with the vision fair
Of human liberty, thus to them shown,
In strong, firm, holy resoluteness, dare
Tear Superstition from her ancient throne—

Level her shrines and altars 'mid the dust
Of empires; shout the doom of Mammon-king
In thunder tones, while wealth and money-lust
Still popular homage of the people bring.
Souls who, unhesitating, can endure
The hate of those they love and strive to save;
Souls who, inspired by passion grand and pure,
March on, unflinching, to the martyr's grave.

These, then, are those whose love divine exceeds
The love that lays down life for dearest friend;
The souls who, feeling universal needs,
Go on, unwavering, to the bitter end;
Hated by those they love, and crucified
Upon the cross of bold Authority;
Hunted to death, reviled and vilified
For centuries after—till men shall be free.

These souls possess the love that knows and feels;
Which, knowing oneness with all human kind
(A knowledge which heav'n's light alone reveals)
Goes forth to lead the world from ignorance
blind,
To live for love and truth, and sacrifice,
If need be, hopes—ambitions—life, and prove
By their unselfish payment of the price,
The passion grand—the holy, GREATER LOVE.

Ode to Immortality.

O, Life Immortal ! Thou whose living breath
Inspires our inmost souls with hope and power;
To thee, the Conqueror of Decay and Death,
In humble reverence, we bow this hour.
Whence camest thou? And where was thine
abode
In ages ere by man the earth was trod?
Aye, e'en before the birth of land or flood,
Thou then existed—and wert Truth and God.

Enwrapped thou art, and hidden 'neath the veil
Of mystery. Thy source has ne'er been found.
Our human knowledge is of no avail,
Thy secret is so deep, and so profound.
Thou speakest in the flower and in the stone,
In sun, in air, in sky, in earth and sea;
Still is thy secret kept to thee alone;
Thou Life ! Thou blessed IMMORTALITY !

Perchance, sometime, when from its earthly home
My soul soars upward through the realms of
space,
I may, in some celestial clime or zone,
Find entrance to thine inner dwelling place.
But now, e'en now, this soul of mine I know
Shall still live on, after its house of clay
Has perished, and when this brief night below
Is ended—in the light of Heaven's day.

The Dreamer.

He stands upon the eminence that marks
Man's progress to the present hour. His gaze
Is backward cast, along the road the race
Has traveled; and within his soul he feels
The yearnings, hopes, ambitions, pains and fears
Of men and nations numbered with the dead.—
And as he gazes back along the path—
The rugged, thorny path—that man has trod,
Forth from its lurking shadows rise the forms
Of those whose voices, long since hushed and
dumb,

Now only speak to those, who, in the hour
Of thoughtful reverie, turn the pages back
In the great book of human history,
And, in the light of retrospect, review
The struggles of the races gone before.

They come! The heroes, prophets, sages, kings
Of ages past; and in the Dreamer's ear
They pour the tales of victory and defeat,
Of joy and pain, of honor and disgrace,
Which, alternating, form the warp and woof
Of History's fabric, since the days of yore
When ruddy Adam was from Eden driven
Because, through disobedience to the will

Of God his master (thus the fable reads)
He knowledge sought and gained; and in his fall
From blissful ignorance and simplicity,
Is planted the first stake that marks the way
Of man's eternal upward climb toward
The portals of a better Eden, graced
By vines of Love and fruits of Brotherhood.

The ancient shades, springing again to life,
As History unrolls her magic scroll,
Press round the Dreamer, and into his ear
They chant the songs and tell the tales of yore.
Mingled with lyric strains, that sing the praise
Of Beauty, deified, immortalized
By sculptors' art in ancient Greece and Rome,
Sound notes discordant; and the muffled Fates
Chant in their weird and solemn tones the tale
Of Empire's wreck and Revolution's flame;
Of dire misfortune, and of bitter wrong;
Of tortured Innocence, Beauty laid waste
And human happiness thrown down and crushed
Beneath the iron heel of Authority
And Selfishness, enthroned in Church and State.

From Egypt and from world-famed Babylon,
From Iran and from Norse-land bleak they come;
Aye, even from the depths of Ocean's bed—
Where, buried in the slumber of a dead,

Lost continent, sleep tales of glory gone—
The hoary spirits of the past arise,
And tell of the departed splendor, which
Went down in cataclysmic wreck, that swept
From earth the presence of a noble race,
Leaving "Atlantis" a tradition fair,
To live in Mystic's lore and Poet's theme.
Yet, 'mid the strains that chant the rise and fall
Of long-forgotten empires—buried now
Beneath the mouldering ruins of the past—
The harmony of Progress greets the ear.

Anon its tones, melodious and sweet,
Are mingled with the martyr's dying song;
And then great Luther strikes a mighty chord,
While in the voice of bold John Gutenberg
A strain triumphant sounds; the mighty press
Is launched upon its mission, and the means
Of knowledge multiplied a million-fold.
In Pilgrim's song, on Plymouth's rock-bound
coast,
Its strains are heard; then sounding 'mid the roar
Of Revolution's tumult, ring the notes
Which gladly herald to the world the birth
Of fair Columbia. Valorous Washington,
Great Paine and Franklin bold, their voices join
With Henry, Adams, Rush and Jefferson,

While thundering cannon, manned by yeomen brave,
Sound forth the mighty bass of Freedom's song.

* * *

But once again, discordant notes resound;
The bitter cry of Afric's dusky sons,
Held in the bonds of slavery on the soil
Of fair America, rise high to Heaven;
And though no shining angel comes to loose
The shackles from their bruised and weary limbs,
Their piteous moaning, borne upon the air,
Is heard by men, whose grand, fraternal love
Spurs them to action, though the darts of hate
Are hurled on them by black-garbed hypocrites,
Who, in their sacrilegious blasphemy,
Declare that human bondage is the will
Of a divine creator. Men arise
Who boldly dare proclaim the rights of man
Above the mandate of an ancient god.

The Dreamer reverent stands, while Garrison
And noble kindred spirits of that hour
Pass by in grand review; then to his gaze
The war-flags are unfurled, and 'mid the haze
Of battle's sulphurous smoke and hellish din,
Above the beat of drum and shriek of shell,
The Song of Freedom rises once again.

One gaunt, tall figure stands conspicuous
Among the heroes of that dreadful strife;
Called to the state-ship's helm in that dire hour
Of the Republic's trial, Lincoln stands,
His kindly face furrowed and seamed with care,
And his great heart aflame with tender love
The simple honor of the frontier youth,
Now marks the action of the man of state.

With calm, unwavering purpose, undisturbed
By sophist's wile or threat of treach'rous foe,
His eye still fixed on his ideal grand,
Brave, firm and resolute, he performs his task;
And though he fell by the assassin's hand,
His memory is venerated still
By countless millions, and his noble life
Will prove an inspiration to the youth
Of centuries to come. He lived and died
For righteous principle; and 'mid the host
Of heroes, raised up in that trying hour,
No name shines brighter in Columbia's crown
Than that of Lincoln, her devoted son,
Who dared defy both demagogue and priest,
And wipe the blot of slavery from her name.

* * *

Enraptured by the music of the song
That chants the deeds of great ones of the past,
The Dreamer almost feels that here 'tis meet
To raise a shrine in memory of their names,
Counting the field of victory fully won.
But hark! While with bowed head and reverent mien
He stands amid the spirits of the past,
A harsh, tumultuous murmur breaks the spell
That, o'er his soul, the ages' song has cast.—
The sound of groans and curses, rising near,
From hells of human suffering and woe,
Recoil him from the dreams of long ago,
And wake him to the cry of present needs.
A spirit grim is standing at his side,
And a stern voice is sounding in his ear:
“Why stand ye idle? There is work for all.”

It is the voice of he, who, long ago,
Walked in the streets of old Jerusalem;—
The voice, that, raised in protest 'gainst the rule
Of ancient custom and tradition's curse,
Was silenced on the cross of Calvary;
But now, his spirit, resolute and stern,
Stands in its majesty and loud demands
That once again the earth shall hear his voice.
“Think ye that human suffering and woe
No longer stir compassion in my soul?

Think ye the spoilers' curse upon the earth
Less hateful to me than in days of old?
Think ye the law of equity I taught—
'That which man soweth, also must he reap'—
Has changed? That in the shadow of the cross
Your souls may hide? That Justice is asleep?

“Think ye my suffering on Golgotha's tree,
The thorns upon my brow, my nail-pierced hands
And bleeding side, for your sins can atone,
While, careless of the suffering and woe
Of these—my brethren—still ye press the thorns
Of brutal servitude upon their brows?
The altars and the fanes ye rear to me,
Steepled, and domed, and fashioned by the hands
Of those who groan 'neath the oppressor's rod,
Are an abomination in my sight.
The chanted psalms of singers, hired for gold,
Are discord to my ears. The pomp, and show,
And vain lip-service that ye give to me,
While, on the earth, hell's kingdom holds full sway,
Are mockery and insult to my name.

“The angels' song of 'Peace, good will to men,'
Resounding o'er Judea's plains of yore,
Ye loud proclaim—then in your lives deny—
While with the yoke of Mammon's golden god

The suffering workers of the earth are galled;
And warlike hosts, in glittering array,
Still desolate the earth, and mothers' hearts
Are pierced and broken, while the toll of blood
Is paid upon the crimson field of Mars.
Ye pray that heaven's kingdom soon may dawn
Upon the earth, while, in hypocrisy,
Ye feed the flames of hell, and in your greed
Drive men and women to perdition's pit.
Think not because ye cry to me, 'Lord, Lord,'
It shall avail—for Justice is at hand.

"The yawning gateways of your factories
Are entrances to Molech's fearful shrine,
And tender children ye would sacrifice
Upon the fiery altar of your greed,
Cry out to heaven for their deliverance;
And while ye—stony-hearted—heed them not,
Think ye the hand of Justice e'er shall stay?
Nay, for the time of reaping is at hand,
And harvest must ye reap from all the seed
That ye have sown. The bleeding, broken hearts
Of mothers, weeping for their cherished sons,
The souls of children, crushed beneath the wheels
Of Mammon's golden car, the tears of shame
Upon the cheek of beauteous Magdalene,
All cry for vengeance, and thy day has come."

The august shade, his fearful message given,
Fades from the Dreamer's vision, and is gone;
But louder grow the curses and the cries
Of millions laboring 'neath the spoilers' curse;
Now, roused at last to knowledge of their strength,
The pent-up fury of their passion bursts,
Even as, after warning rumblings, breaks
The fierce eruption of Vesuvius,
And in its awful rain of fire hurls down
Death and destruction on the slopes beneath.
Outraged and maddened by their mighty wrongs,
Their lean, wolf faces—threatening to behold—
Show ghastly in the light of angry flames
Their torches kindle; and their curses wild
Strike terror to the hearts of all who hear.

The heavens are veined with lightning, and the night
Of war and desolation closes down,
Seeming to smother with its hateful pall
All that is human in the hearts of men.
Forth from the dens of ignorance and woe
Swarm greed-cursed toilers, filled with maddening hate,
While fitful flames anon spring up, and shed
Their ruddy light upon the sickening scenes
Of blood and violence; as though, perchance,
The demons of a thousand hells were loosed,
To wreak their vengeance on the suffering earth;

The stifling air is rent with shrieks and groans,
And War's dread thunders belch forth hail of death,
Until it seems the ages' promise fair
Is doomed to perish, and its song to cease.

But hark! Still, sounding 'mid the clamorous strife,
The notes of Freedom's glorious song resound;
Faintly at first, then ringing loud and clear,
As, led by souls exalted, the refrain
Is caught up by the teeming multitude;
Then, while in mighty tones the anthem swells,
The pall of war is lifted, and behold!
The sky, so lately dark with heavy clouds
And riv'n by lightning's terrors, now reveals
The rainbow promise in its azure arch,
Betokening the welcome day of peace.
Upon the hills and towers the heralds shout:
"Behold! The Dawn of Brotherhood is come,
Foretold by sage and prophet, long ago.
Rejoice! Now, truly, man hath Eden found;
Earth is redeemed from strife, and sin, and woe."

* * *

The spirits of the past have flown; but now
Beside the Dreamer stands a radiant one,
Clothed in the glory of the rising morn.

It is the Muse of Brotherhood. His hand
Is laid upon the Dreamer's eyes, and lo!
The veil obscuring future vision lifts,
And a new earth—most beauteous to behold—
Is now revealed to his enraptured gaze.
He sees the age-long struggle ended, and
Justice and Truth reigning o'er all the earth,
Where men for untold centuries had knelt
To worship Custom and Authority—
Kissing the hand that lashed them, and upon
Their limbs, in ignorance, blindly forging still
The galling shackles of their slavery.

The Dreamer with ecstatic joy beholds
The pillars of the State Fraternal rise,
Rearing its grand, majestic beauty o'er
The ashes of a dead, barbaric past.
Hushed is the cannon's roar, and in its stead
A world-wide chorus rises in accord—
The song-victorious of humanity.
No more the demons Privilege and Caste
Before the gates of happy Eden stand,
Forbidding men to enter and enjoy;
For Caste and Privilege departed, when,
In bitter, fiery conflict, thundered down
Both cloister and throne. Their bulwarks gone,
Downward they sink, to the infernal pit
Of hell, from whence their hateful spirits came.

All men now labor for the common weal,
Toiling in unison, with purpose grand;
And Science, leaping forth with giant stride,
Works unheard wonders. Now the arid wastes
Are made to bloom and blossom like the rose,
For all are sharers in the fruits of toil.
No more from hungry, homeless ones goes up
The wail of agony, while heartless Greed
Limits the harvest yield, and hoards away
Earth's fruits from millions of her toiling sons.
No more do baleful Pestilence and Crime
Stalk in the cities, for they, too, have fled
Before the on-march of Fraternity;
But peace and plenty now, on every hand,
Proclaim the glory of a world redeemed.

* * *

This is the Dream of Centuries; the song
That, ringing through the darkness of the past,
Has cheered the soul of man, and set his face
Toward the shining goal; spurring him on
Along the upward pathway, though his road
Was dark and thorny. This the vision bright
Oft' sung by poet and foretold by seer;
The holy cause for whose dear name have died
The christs and heroes of the long ago.

And till the holy flame of Brotherhood
Kindles the altar fire in every breast,
The Vision Beautiful shall still be seen
By Earth's great children, and the Glorious Song
Shall evermore resound, until, at last,
Its strains shall swell in harmony divine
The chorus of redeemed humanity—
Earth's glad hymn of Fraternity and Peace.



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